

Week of February 10, 2019

Rebuild: *Refresh*

Ezra 5-6

Getting Started:

1) Share a time when someone's discouraging words made you want to quit something.

The Big Idea:

The temple has been sitting unfinished for 14 years. It looks like they'll never finish. What gets the process started, and how are they able to finish it despite renewed and more intense opposition? The answer is the ministry of the prophets. To put simply, a prophet was a person that God sometimes used to encourage people to find strength and motivation in God.

Digging Deeper:

Read Ezra 5-6:16

- 2) The people began to build again because of the prophets. Where do you see that in verses 1 & 2?
- 3) They had stopped building because of initial ongoing verbal assaults (4:4-5). There is nothing that explicitly says they were compelled by the state to stop. They seem to do so out of pure discouragement.
 - a) Discouraging words make people lose heart and want to give up. Give some examples.
 - b) Entire families and communities can inadvertently reinforce discouraging messages amongst each other, holding the group in ruts of dysfunction. Give some examples.
 - c) The prophets disrupt the false narrative believed by God's people and speak a message of life and hope. What are some passages that talk about the power of your speech to either empower or crush people's drive?
- 4) As soon as they reengage in the building project, they are met with a war of words. Though arguably more intense than the first (the king is dragged into it this time), they don't stop as they did before. That's because "the prophets of God were with them supporting them," diffusing the verbal assault with encouraging words.
 - a) Christians experience a war of words in their minds each day. Give some examples of what this war sounds like?
 - b) In order to fight that war well, this story strongly implies you need other Christians to speak to the battle happening inside of you. Do you agree?
 - c) We are given an example of one of the prophets encouraging the building project during this opposition. Read Zechariah 4:6-10. What stands out to you about the nature his cheerleading and how God might want you to speak to others?

5) In chapter 6:14 the conflict has finally passed. Nevertheless we find that the prophets are still encouraging the people and they prosper more because of it.

a) Encouragement isn't always for people who are down and out. Explain why?

b) Encouragement can challenge people to not settle for the good, but to strive for the excellent. How does Paul illustrate this principle with his faith in Philippians 3:12-15?

Making It Real:

6) Take some time and have the group encourage each person in their faith.